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Rocky Mts

STALKING THE HAPLOCERUS IN THE SELKIRKS.

By W. A. BAILLIE-GROHMAN.

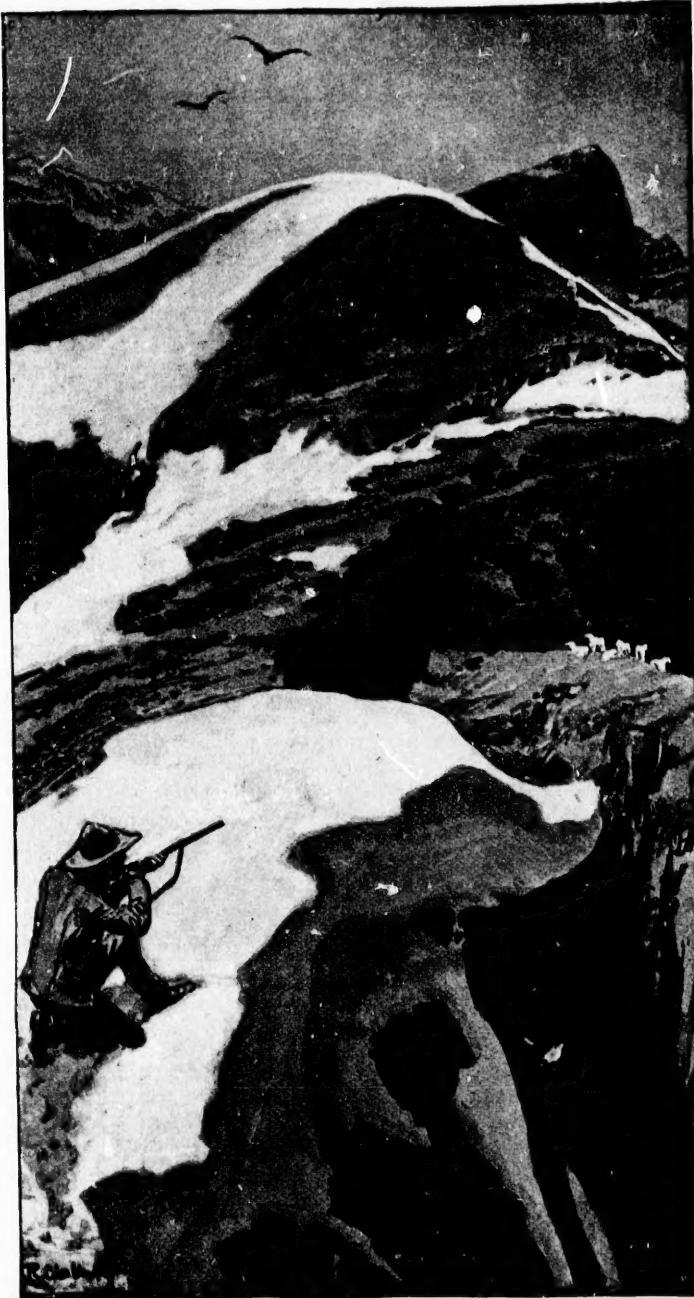
IN a previous article on sport in the Rocky Mountains, stress was laid on the depletion which the big-game of that inviting region suffered at the hands of the skin-hunters. It would not be fair, however, to say that this fate was shared by all the various species of big-game, for there is at least one kind—and an interesting one it is too—which escaped the slaughter that has been such a regrettable coincident feature of the wonderful material progress of the West during the last quarter of a century. This exception is the so-called "goat" of the Rocky Mountains. Fifteen years ago the writer had goat on his brain, and the virulence of the disease was only heightened when he made himself acquainted with the literature of this hero of scientific romances. Twenty-three writers, he discovered, had given the animal thirteen different generic names, and the question to which family it belonged was then apparently as unsettled as in Ord's day. Some ranked it as a sheep, others as a deer, another school considered it a chamois, while in the days of Fremont it even played a political rôle as the famous "woolly horse" in the songs of the so-called Pathfinder's campaign. Only one naturalist (De Blainville) came to the conclusion that it was an antelope, and in this allocation the late Professor Baird, whom the world knows as one of America's greatest naturalists, supported him. Owing to the simple character of this animal's horns Professor Baird gave it the generic name of *Aplocerus montanus*, which English naturalists, who, by the way, appear to speak of it still as a goat, say should be spelt *Haplocerus*, the Greek word for "simple," *haploos*, being aspirated. So even to-day this animal's name, as well as its place in natural history, is not definitely settled.

Except far north it does not inhabit the Rocky Mountains proper, but almost exclusively the much less accessible mountain chains occupying the belt of land four or

five hundred miles wide which lies between the great backbone of the continent and the Pacific coast. Instances of misnomers are frequent in the States, and this one is even more excusable than calling a wapiti an elk, a bison a buffalo, or a mule deer a blacktail, for the history of the "goat" is, as has been shown, by no means as well known as that of the other animals named.

Three consecutive years I had crossed the ocean and sought this animal in what were then still the best hunting-grounds of the West, but in vain, for I was seeking them in the Rockies of Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Central Idaho, where goats never existed. The fourth expedition, to the Bitterroot Mountains, on the borders of Western Montana and Northern Idaho, was more successful, my bag consisting of nine head, but there were no big ones among the lot. So I determined to devote the following season to regions yet further north, yet more remote from beaten tracks; and thus the trip to the Selkirk Mountains, which I am proposing to describe, came to be undertaken.

A five days' railway journey takes the traveller to-day from New York across the main Rockies to the attractive Flathead country, as good a starting-point for a summer's hunt as there is left. If he is a lover of canoe work he has a good chance of trying his mettle by taking to the rushing Kootenai river and following it through the more than hundred miles long cañons it has burrowed through the southern extremity of the Selkirk range till he reaches, at Bonner's Ferry, more open country. It will make him acquainted with all the mysteries of canoe-travel, "portaging," running swift water, shooting whirlpools, and other exciting incidents. If he values his life he will, however, have an experienced man in the bow of his craft, for there is ugly water in those cañons, and I would not like to say what proportion of the number of men



A SHOT AT A WHITE GOAT.

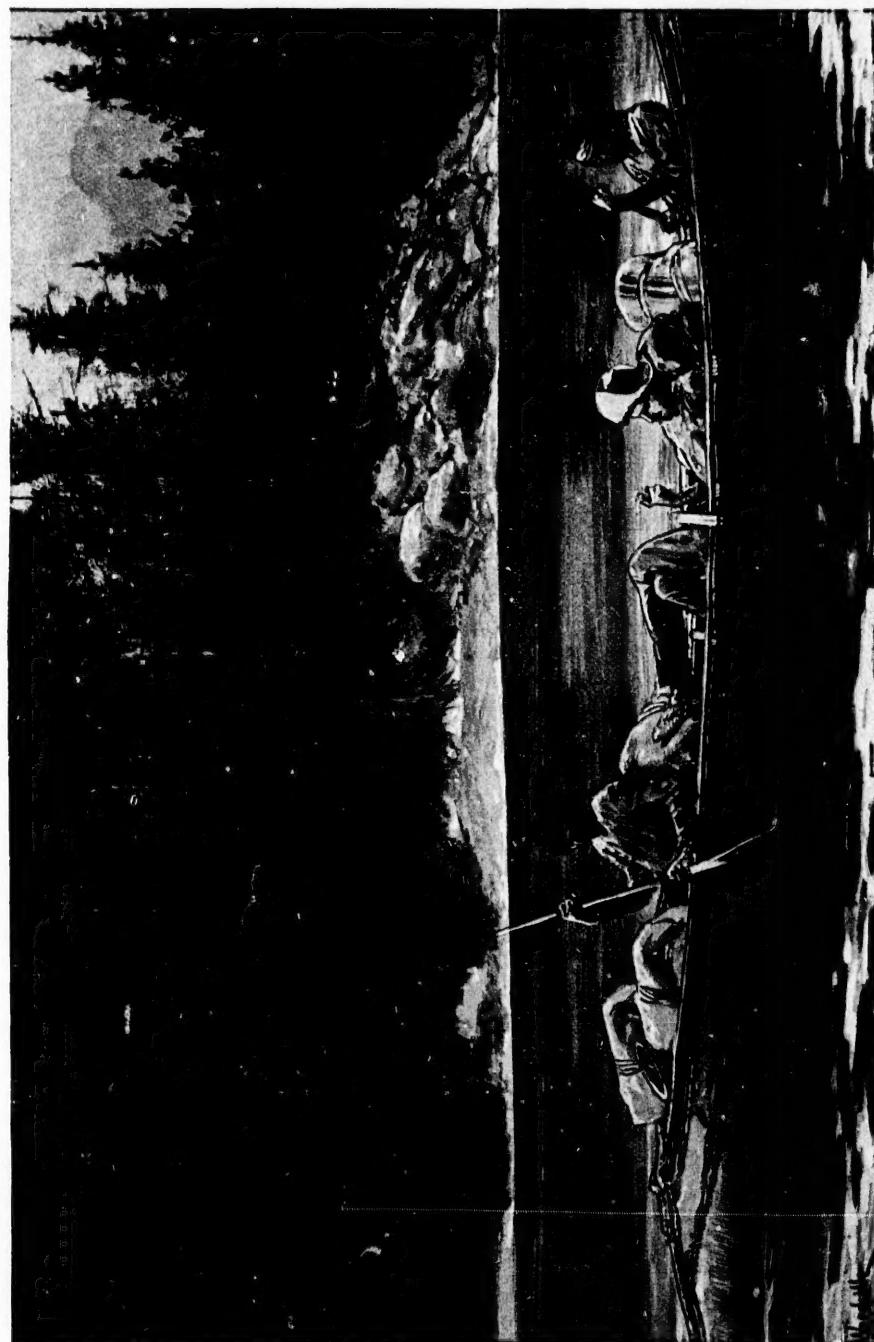
who have attempted to "make" this part of the river has survived. In the year I made the trip in question the Great

family, which filled to over-flowing the two log shanties of which "Fry's ranche" consisted. Even thirteen years

Northern had not been thought of, and even the Northern Pacific was still under construction, so it took me four weeks' travel from the Atlantic and a long horse-back journey to reach Bonners Ferry. There it became necessary to abandon horses altogether, and to cover the rest of the distance—some 160 miles

—by canoe down the Kootenai river and lake (in British Columbia this name is spelt Kootenay) to the foot of the mountains, which were said to harbour the large mountain antelopes I was seeking.

Bonner's Ferry, now a prosperous settlement with a newspaper, an important station on the Great Northern line, and the starting-point of several steamers, was, in the days I am speaking of, a place that had a name but only one white inhabitant, a trapper, Indian trader and miner, and last, but not least, father of an extensive half-breed



A TRIP DOWN THE KOOTENAY RIVER.

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ago it was an extremely out-of-the-way spot, the only means of reaching it being a zig-zag Indian trail winding through dense forests for many a weary day's travel. Walla Walla was the nearest "city," and when Fry made his bi-annual trip "to town" to exchange his peltry and gold-dust for flour and goods for his Indian trading-post, it meant an eight days' ride each way.

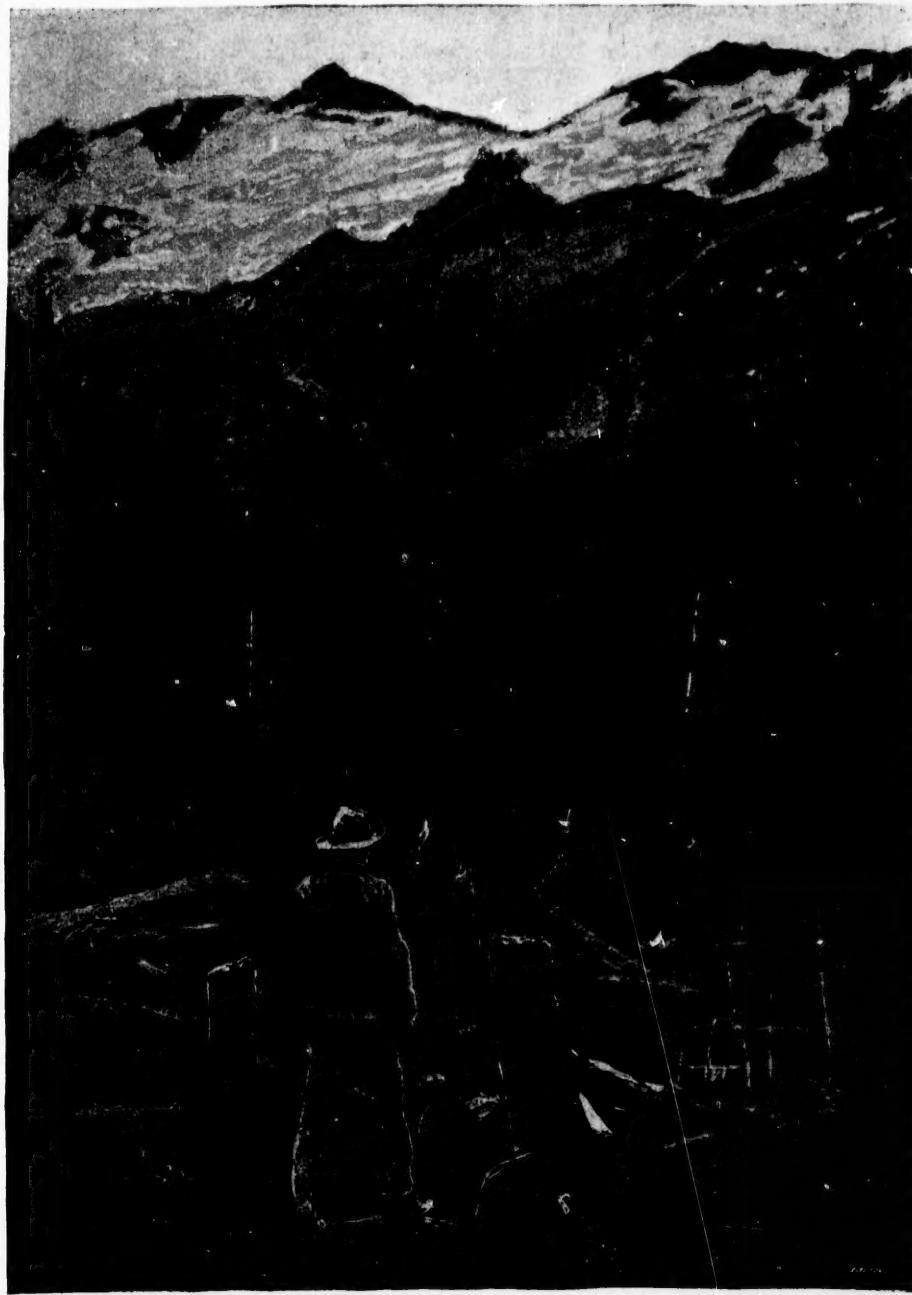
Near his ranche was a large Indian village of American Kootenais, as they were called to distinguish them from another part of the same tribe who lived on the other side of the line on Canadian soil. Domiciled on the banks of the broad stately Kootenai river, one of the principal head-waters of the Columbia, these Indians were Canoe and not Horse-Indians, the surrounding country being much too densely timbered to allow the use of horses. After the austere and suspicious Indians of Wyoming and Eastern Montana, I was much struck with the pleasant, laughter-loving Kootenais and Kootenays. They were also by far the most unsophisticated and primitive aborigines I had ever met. A breech cloth, a string of blue and red glass beads round their necks, and a curiously-shaped conical white felt hat, adorned with mink and sable tails, being the only clothing the males sported, while the women wore a nightgown-like garment of coarse sacking imported by astute Fry from Walla Walla. Their village was picturesquely situated under a grove of fine old cottonwood trees, the tent-shaped *teppes* being made of mats of interlaced reeds instead of skins or canvas. Outside each tent, resting on light trestles, one saw one or two canoes lying bottom upwards and covered with mats or boughs to prevent the sun from cracking the frail bark of which they are constructed. Their shape was peculiar to the tribe, and very pretty "lines" these craft possessed. Both prow and stern, slightly turned up, were pointed and shaped similar to the ram of an ironclad. When not too heavily laden neither touched the water, so that only the broad rounded bottom of the canoe rested on the surface, making the craft a crank but swift traveller.

Several of the younger bucks understood Chinook, that hotch-potch of French, English, Spanish, with a good many Indian terms thrown in, which used to assist intercourse between the whites and the numerous tribes of the Pacific slope.

My wants were soon known among the tribe, and, as high-water would soon oblige the whole tribe to vacate their present camping place and disperse on hunting and fishing expeditions, I had no trouble in finding what I wanted, *i.e.* two Indians and a good roomy canoe where-with to reach the northern end of the great lake into which the river emptied, from where we would "pack" the stores and tent to good goat-ground on the mountains which rise steeply from the shores of that great sheet of water. Half an hour's consultation produced the man: a youngish "buck" of smiling face and fine physique, his bristly jet black hair covered by the usual cone-shaped hat adorned with more tails than I had seen on any other. In his arms, nursing it like a woman would her baby, he fondled one of the few Winchester rifles then to be found in the tribe, while his brawny chest showed very distinctly the marks of a bear's claw. He was, as I at once surmised, a noted hunter, and really belonged to the Canadian Kootenays whose proper hunting grounds I was intending to visit.

Terms were soon arranged, a dollar a day for him and the same for his "clootch-man," a Chinook term which I did not understand at the time, but which I thought meant a friend or relation. The start was to be made early next morning and the interval was occupied in repitching the canoe and collecting the required simple provisions for the month's hunt, and in writing a few letters for which there was at present, however, no known means of conveyance, for Fry's pack-train to Walla Walla would not be starting for another fortnight or three weeks.

It was only as I was about to step into the canoe at dawn next morning that the identity of the "clootchman" was revealed; it was my friend's squaw! Unlike the Horse-Indians of the Plains whose squaws occupy a far more subservient position towards their lords and masters, the squaws of the Kootenays accompany the males on all their hunting expeditions and are better treated. Noticing my discomfiture at the discovery, Fry, who was watching our start, explained to me that this was the usual order of things, and assured me that I wouldn't be long in finding out that, so far as willingness to work and general handiness went, the clootchman would prove the better "man" of the two; and



A HEAVY MARCH THROUGH A WINDFALL.

eminently right this obliging Indian trader was.

The hundred mile trip down the lovely river to the lake was a delightful one.

Comfortably ensconced in the centre of the canoe, my waterproof yachting bag giving me a comfortable "back," I could wield the paddle or remain idle, my

dusky Darby and Joan keeping up their regular steady stroke for a long five hours till it was time to land and get lunch. The river, though now "bankful," had but little current and serpented in huge loops through the beautiful valley, both banks being covered with a fringe of fine cottonwood and other deciduous trees. The whole country from Fry's onward was totally uninhabited by whites, the only log dwelling in the valley beside Fry's being also owned by a man with a large Indian family. It was built close to the boundary line where the 49th par. divides by an imaginary line the United States from Canada. This point we reached the following afternoon after a memorably uncomfortable night on the banks of the river, where, in spite of "smudges" and netting, one was simply eaten up by mosquitoes, which filled the air in masses the like of which I have never seen in any part of the world. Another night, if possible worse, had to be spent on the banks of the overflowing river, and then by taking a short cut in the canoe across a sort of inland lake, which at other seasons is a swamp, we reached the lake, and with it comparative immunity from the curse of summer travel in that country.

Kootenay lake is ninety miles long, three to four miles wide, and is exceedingly deep. It is surrounded on all sides by steeply rising, heavily timbered mountains of picturesque shape and considerable height. It was a glorious June afternoon when we glided out of the tree-bowered mouth of the river and saw before us the lake. One could see almost to the end of the mirror-like sheet, in which the row of peaks on both sides, still capped with snow, were reflected most effectively. Over the whole scene lay the charm of absolute wildness and solitude. To-day, alas! that charm has vanished; dishevelled-looking mining settlements line the shores, the forests have suffered by great fires which, for several summers, enveloped the whole country for four or five months in dense smoke, steamers filled with miners and land speculators awaken the echoes by their shrill whistles, which are answered by the yet more discordant locomotive bell, and the surrounding mountains are over-run by prospectors in quest of silver veins, now of somewhat depreciated value, with which these mountains seem scored.

After a night in a quiet cove on the rockbound shore we reached the northern

end of the lake the following evening, having laid in a goodly stock of fish—splendid landlocked salmon—which I caught trolling as we paddled along. Long before we reached our goal, a bit of sandy beach a few miles from the extreme end of the lake, shock-headed "Darby" had pointed out to me a prominent peak as the *akokle* where there were *hiyou kianooko*—the mountain where there were lots of goats. It was a "bald"-looking eminence, rising some 6,000 feet over the lake, the last 1,500 or 2,000 feet being entirely bare of vegetation. *Caching* the canoe and the main stock of provisions in the brush, we made at dawn on the following morning an early start. Our loads were heavy, considering the climb and the country we were about to tackle, and what was really surprising was the tremendous load shouldered by the slim and diminutive "Joan," who I am sure would, including her sole garment, not have turned the scales at seven stone. The first few hundred yards into the forest, which was a mass of dense under-brush, made my heart sink within me, for I did not know that we would presently strike a faint trail, the commencement of which was thus hidden from intruders who had no business there, the whole country, it must be mentioned, being subdivided among the different heads of families of the tribe. This was "Darby's" own particular preserve, and a better and handier one there was not on Kootenay lake.

It took us all day to climb less than 4,000 feet, *i.e.*, to reach the rocks beyond timber line, where, just at the outskirts of forest vegetation, we made as *skookum* (snug) a camp as the somewhat limited level space permitted. My tiny "A" tent, which, with my sleeping bag and rifle, had been my load, was soon pitched, and next morning while indefatigable Joan went down to the lake for a second load of things, "Darby" and I went after game. Signs innumerable we soon struck, and as we reached higher altitudes and obtained a wider outlook, the sharp-eyed "Darby," who of course knew exactly where to look, had soon spotted a band lying motionless like blocks of stone on a patch of green grass at the bottom of a *coulhoir* filled with snow about three-quarters of a mile off. As words failed me to describe how I proposed to arrange the stalk, sign-language and pantomime had to assist in bringing about an understanding between us. "Darby"

was as hard as nails, fleet of foot, and blessed with lungs which enabled him to run up the steepest slopes at a speed most men would be content to develop on level ground. Moreover, he was not much hampered by clothes ; mocassins on his feet, a breech-cloth round his loins, and a string of beads, was all that encumbered him, the treasured hat having been left behind at Bonner's Ferry. I thought it wise, therefore, if I was to have a "look in" at those "goats," to let him take the longer route, while I determined to approach the game from the upper side, entailing no great *détour*. Darby started off under cover, of course, of a ridge, at a pace which made me wish he was more heavily handicapped, but it was too late to alter the programme. Putting my best foot foremost I found myself fifteen minutes later craning over the precipice at the bottom of which I had last seen the "goats" apparently quite unconscious of danger. A few yards to my right was the steep snow-couloir, at which, in my hurry to get a glimpse of the "goat" below me, I had, however, not looked. No game was visible on the patch of verdure, but there, squatting behind a rock, I saw Darby, who, to judge by the direction of his rifle, appeared to be in the act of shooting at me. At this moment a clinking of stones close to me at my right attracted my attention. Turning my head sharply, what was my surprise to see seven mountain antelope calmly climbing up the snow-couloir not fifteen yards off. They had already seen

me, or rather my head and rifle, for the rest of my body was still under cover of the sharp ridge on the off side of which I was lying. Other mountain game would have been sent scurrying away by such a suspicious sight ; not so, however, these curious animals. There wasn't a big buck among the lot, so I thought I would just see what they would do. On reaching the top of the *coulloir* where the slant became gentler, they all halted gazing at me, and one, a three or four year old male, absolutely sat down on his haunches in the most unconcerned manner. A rude interruption was however in store for them, for "Darby," as soon as the animals had got out of his sight, had followed them up the *coulloir* — how he ever managed it with slippery mocassins on his feet is a mystery to me — and presently I saw his head, with his long hair fluttering wildly in the breeze, pop up over the crest of the ridge. The next second he had opened fire. But even then these queer animals did not dash off, as chamois or big-horn would have done, and "Darby" dropped four of them before they got beyond 150 yards, while I contented myself with bringing down the biggest of the lot. "Darby" appeared greatly surprised at my not shooting more, but finally was made to understand that I had come to shoot only big old males. A couple of days afterwards luck favoured me, and I bagged what proved to be one of the largest Haplocerus I have ever killed, a fine old buck who weighed quite 180 lbs.